

## Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3479

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0656

BONN PLEASE PASS SUBSTANCE THIS TELEGRAM TO MRS BRADFORD HAM

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MEDIA ALARMISM ABOUT ERITREAN SITUATION

1. CONGEN UNDERSTANDS THAT FOREIGN MEDIA, IN PARTICULAR GERMAN AND OTHER EUROPEAN RADIO BROADCASTS, ARE DEPICTING ERITREAN SITUATION IN LURID TERMS. IN PARTICULAR, ASMARA IS REPORTEDLY DESCRIBED AS BEING "UNDER SIEGE" BY INSURGENTS AND LIKELY TO "FALL" AT ANY MOMENT. GENERAL IMPRESSION GIVEN IS THAT ASMARA IS IN POSITION ANALOGOUS TO THAT OF PHNOM PENH A FEW DAYS BEFORE ITS CAPITULATION.

2. IT IS ALSO EVIDENT FROM PRIVATE MESSAGES RECEIVED BY AMERICANS  
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HERE THAT SUCH REPORTS, REBROADCAST AND PICKED UP BY PRESS,

ARE CAUSING CONSIDERABLE CONCERN ON THE PART OF RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

3. AS IS EVIDENT FROM RECENT CONGEN REPORTING, THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN TENSION IN ASMARA AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS INSTITUTED A NUMBER OF REPRESSIVE MEASURES, INCLUDING PROHIBITION ON ALL BUT CONVOYED COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC BETWEEN CITIES IN ERITREA. IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND, HOWEVER, THAT THESE MEASURES HAVE BEEN UNDERTAKEN BY THE MILITARY TO PREEMPT INSURGENT ATTACKS AND TO REDUCE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN INSURGENTS IN THE FIELD AND THOSE UNDERGROUND IN THE CITIES. THERE HAVE BEEN A VARIETY OF ENGAGEMENTS IN THE FIELD, INCLUDING THE RECENT FAIRLY LARGE ONE AT DECAMERE (ASMARA 0613 NOTAL). HOWEVER, TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, INSURGENT STRENGTH REMAINS DISPERSED AND ASMARA IS DEFINITELY NOT RPT NOT "UNDER SIEGE." THE MILITARY REMAINS CAPABLE OF MOVING ANYWTERE IT SEES FIT IN ERITREA, ALBEIT AT THE RISK OF AMBUSHES OF VARIOUS SORTS, AND IS CERTAINLY CAPABLE OF SUCCESSFULLY CONVOYING NECESSARY COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC TO THE EXTENT THAT IT SEES FIT TO DO SO. THE ROAD TO MASSAWA HAD BEEN OPEN FOR MONTHS UNTIL JULY 23 WHEN IT WAS CLOSED TO ALL BUT CONVOYED COMMERCIAL TRAFFIC. THERE HAD BEEN NO INCIDENTS ON THE ROAD EXCEPT FOR AMBUSH AND BURNING OF A GASOLINE TRUCK AND A PROVISIONS TRUCK EARLY IN MARCH. TRAVEL TO KEREN AND POINTS WEST HAS BEEN MORE PROBLEMATIC BUT AGAIN,

UNTIL THE PROHIBITION IMPOSED ON JULY 23, WAS FAIRLY REGULAR DESPITE FREQUENT MILITARY ACTIONS, PARTICULARLY IN THE KEREN AREA. TO THE SOUTH, MORE OR LESS THE SAME SITUATION OBTAINED WITH FREQUENT INSURGENT THREATS AGAINST THE DRIVERS OF COMMERCIAL VEHICLES AND PERIODIC INTERRUPTIONS IN TRAVEL BY INSURGENT AMBUSHES ON THE ADI UGRI-AXUM-GONDAR ROAD AND AMBUSHES AND MINING ON THE ASMARA-DECAMERE-ADIGRAT-MAKELLE ROAD. IT SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED THAT THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE MILITARY TO CONTROL ROAD TRAFFIC WERE OBVIOUSLY TAKEN IN ORDER TO DECREASE INSURGENT MOBILITY AND ENHANCE THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY'S ABILITY TO CONTEND WITH INSURGENT AMBUSHES. THESE RESTRICTIONS WERE UNDERTAKEN BY THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES AND ARE NOT RPT NOT THE RESULT OF CONFIDENTIAL

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AN INSURGENT "ENCIRCLEMENT" OF ASMARA.

4. THE HARSH REPRESSIVE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY APPEAR TO HAVE HAD SOME EFFECT. THE CITY OF ASMARA IS QUIET AND THERE HAS BEEN NO FIRING OF ANY KIND FOR A WEEK. THE RAINY SEASON IS NOW AT ITS HEIGHT, BUT NO "INSURGENT OFFENSIVE" IN ERITREA IS EVIDENT, AGAINST ASMARA OR ANY OTHER TOWNS. THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT FIGHTING COULD NOT BREAK OUT AGAIN AT VARIOUS POINTS IN

ERITREA, BUT MERELY TO EMPHASIZE THAT TO DATE, AT LEAST, THE  
ETHIOPIAN MILITARY REMAINS IN CONTROL IN ERITREA.  
SHERRY

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